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⑪ Publication number:

0 086 538
A1

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EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

⑬ Application number: 83200208.3
⑭ Date of filing: 09.02.83

⑮ Int. Cl.: C 07 C 9/04, C 07 C 1/04,
C 07 C 1/10, B 01 J 23/74

⑯ Priority: 12.02.82 NL 8200544

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⑲ Date of publication of application: 24.08.83
Bulletin 83/34

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㉑ Designated Contracting States: BE DE FR GB IT NL

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㉓ Process for the production of methane.

㉔ A process for the preparation of methane from gas mixtures containing hydrogen and/or steam and at least 5% by volume of carbonmonoxide by means of a nickel catalyst, which contains on a thermally stable oxidic carrier metallic nickel particles as an active catalyst component, in which the metallic nickel particles are chemically bonded to the thermally stable carrier. The chemical bond between the metallic nickel particles and the carrier is preferably provided by an interfacial layer different from the oxidic carrier, which layer consists of a compound containing oxygen and at least one member selected from the group consisting of nickel and the carrier base element or elements.

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Process for the production of methane.

The invention relates to a process for the preparation of methane from gas mixtures containing hydrogen and/or steam and at least 5% by volume of carbon monoxide by means of a nickel catalyst, which contains metallic nickel particles as an active catalyst component on a thermally stable oxidic carrier.

On account of the high oil prices a growing interest is being displayed in the production of methane from gas mixtures containing carbon monoxide, which can be obtained, for example, from coal. It is possible in this way to produce a substitute for natural gas from 10 coal. The natural gas currently distributed in many countries contains about 85% by vol. of methane. Hence, if it is desired to produce gas from coal, which is readily interchangeable with the currently distributed natural gas, such gas must have a high methane content.

15 The obvious method for production of methane from coal would seem to be direct hydrogenation of coal according to the reaction:
$$C + 2H_2 \rightleftharpoons CH_4.$$

However, with many types of coal such a direct hydrogenation process presents technical problems, while furthermore the reaction 20 rate is too low to render such hydrogenation technically feasible. When the temperature is raised, the above equilibrium shifts to the left. If it is desired to increase the reaction rate by raising the temperature, it is necessary to apply high hydrogen pressures. Even at a high temperature and elevated hydrogen pressure the reaction 25 rate is still too low. Moreover, hydrogen is required for direct hydrogenation. It is true that the production of hydrogen from coal has been satisfactorily achieved technically, but such production requires much thermal energy. The difficult reaction between coal and hydrogen as well as the high energy costs, do not make direct 30 hydrogenation of coal an attractive proposition yet.

Another known process is the gasification of coal at elevated temperature with steam and oxygen. At temperatures between 1000 and 1500°C coal mainly reacts according to the reaction equation:



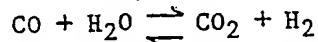
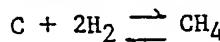
which reaction is highly endothermic.

The required heat of reaction is derived from the reaction which takes place according to the equation $2C + O_2 \rightleftharpoons 2CO$, which reaction is highly exothermic.

5 If in the gasification of coal air is used as the source of oxygen, the gas obtained is diluted by the nitrogen which remains after the reaction of the oxygen.

However, dilution with nitrogen is generally not admissible. For this reason it is necessary to work with pure oxygen in the production of so-called synthetic natural gas. Inasmuch as the production of pure oxygen requires a lot of equipment and energy, oxygen consumption plays an important part in the economics of the gasification process.

Another important factor in coal gasification is other energy 15 utility consumption. Gasification processes can be distinguished according to their operating temperature. If gasification takes place at a relatively low maximum temperature, the oxygen consumption is indeed low, but a lot of steam is required, e.g. from 5 to 10 times the stoichiometrically required quantity of steam. This higher steam 20 consumption is compensated by the lower oxygen consumption. At lower temperature the following equilibria shift somewhat to the right:

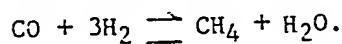


Partly on account of the limited quantity of oxygen supplied the 25 H_2/CO ratio of the gas obtained at relatively low temperature is about 2.

If more oxygen is supplied during gasification of coal, the operating temperature will be higher and less steam is required to allow the coal to react, e.g. only 1.3 times the stoichiometrically 30 required quantity of steam. In the gas thus obtained the H_2/CO ratio is much lower, viz. between 0.4 and 0.8.

It is an object of the present invention to produce methane from gas mixtures containing carbon monoxide.

The mixtures obtained in the gasification of coal can be used as 35 such gas mixtures. The conversion of carbon monoxide into methane can take place according to the reaction:



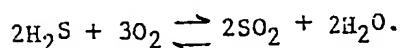
It is known that this reaction proceeds at a high rate when nickel catalysts are used. However, when using gas mixtures obtained in the gasification of coal as a starting material, the problem which arises is that for the methanation reaction the H_2/CO ratio must be 5 3, while in coal gasification, as mentioned above, gas mixtures are obtained with a H_2/CO ratio of from 0.4 to 2. Thus, even the H_2/CO ratio obtained with a low gasification temperature and a lot of steam is too low for methanation.

Moreover the methanation reaction is highly exothermic. As it is difficult to dissipate the heat of reaction quickly, the temperature rises considerably. This can cause damage to the reactor, while often the catalyst is deactivated by the high temperature. Furthermore, at high temperature the equilibrium shifts to the left, as a result of which the conversion of carbon monoxide is seriously restricted.

15 It is possible in itself to adjust the H_2/CO ratio of the gas mixture according to the so-called carbon-monoxide shift reaction:
 $CO + H_2O \rightleftharpoons CO_2 + H_2$.

This reaction requires a catalyst. In a lot of cases a copper/zinc-oxide catalyst is used for this purpose, but this catalyst is 20 highly sensitive to sulphur compounds. Iron-oxide/chromium-oxide catalysts can also be used. They are less sensitive to sulphur compounds, but on the other hand their activity is lower. For this reason it is generally desirable to remove the sulphur compounds from the gas mixture prior to conversion of the carbon monoxide with 25 steam. However, this renders the gas treatment cumbersome, because the sulphur compounds, hydrogen sulphide in particular, are removed by scrubbing with liquids. To this end the gas must be cooled to about 90°C, which causes the steam which is present in the gas to condense. The carbon-monoxide shift reaction, however, requires an 30 excess of steam to shift the equilibrium to the right. When removing the sulphur compounds, however, the steam content of the gas drops considerably. If it is desired to cause the shift reaction to take place after removal of the sulphur compounds, steam must once more be supplied, while moreover the reaction mixture must be raised from 35 90°C to the inlet temperature of the shift reactor, i.e. to between 350 and 450°C. All these measures decrease the thermal efficiency of the gas production.

In the event of a catalyst being used for the carbon-monoxide shift reaction, which is resistant to sulphur compounds, e.g. on a basis of cobalt oxide and molybdenum oxide, the shift reaction is applied prior to removal of the sulphur compounds. But in this case as well serious difficulties are still encountered. In the majority of methods involving the removal of sulphur compounds (hydrogen sulphide in particular) carbon dioxide is also formed. The result is that the sulphur compounds become available with a large excess of carbon dioxide. It is technically difficult, however, to convert 10 highly diluted hydrogen sulphide into elementary sulphur according to the Claus process, which is almost invariably used for this purpose. In the presence of a large volume of inert gas the initial reaction of the present-day Claus process proceeds ineffectively:



15 The reason for this is that, when substantially diluted with inert gas, the gas mixture does not reach the temperature required for the reaction. Since the carbon dioxide content increases due to the carbon monoxide shift reaction, the concentration of hydrogen sulphide in the gas formed drops considerably after the previous conversion of the carbon monoxide.

20 In methods involving gasification of coal at high temperature with little steam and much oxygen there is no objection to the sulphur compounds being removed immediately after gasification. The thermal efficiency is not greatly influenced by the condensation of the slight excess of steam. Gasification at higher temperature, however, produces a relatively large volume of carbon monoxide. After removal of the sulphur compounds a lot of steam is then still required for conversion into hydrogen, viz. about 2 mol steam per mol carbon monoxide to be converted.

25 30 It is evident, therefore, that the combination of sulphur removal and the carbon monoxide shift reaction leads to difficulties. When coal is gasified with a large volume of steam at a low temperature, it is necessary to use a carbon monoxide shift catalyst which is resistant to sulphur, while the processing of the hydrogen sulphide formed is difficult on account of the large volume of carbon dioxide present.

35 In case of gasification of coal at a higher temperature with

little steam more carbon monoxide must be converted, which takes steam, while more heat of reaction must be dissipated at low temperature in order to shift the equilibrium of the shift reaction in the desired direction.

5 The difficulties encountered in the dissipation of the substantial heat of the methanation reaction have hitherto not been satisfactorily solved either. In the methanation reaction the temperature of the reaction mixture rises quickly as a result of the substantial heat of reaction, where the reaction in the catalyst bed 10 starts to proceed considerably. As a result of the fast rising temperature the reaction rate also increases substantially, until the reaction does not proceed any further owing to the position of equilibrium. The result is that methane is formed in only a very limited part of the catalyst bed. In the part of the catalyst bed where 15 methane is formed, however, the catalyst also loses its activity fairly quickly. As a result the zone in which the temperature rises quickly, shifts along the reactor and the catalyst bed must be regenerated or renewed after a short time.

A solution to this problem was proposed by G.A. White, 20 T.R. Roszkowski and D.W. Stanbridge in *Advances in Chemistry, Series 146* (1975), pp. 138-148. Six reactors with catalyst beds in series are employed in this proposed process. The gas mixture is cooled after each reactor before it is passed to the following reactor. However, the outlet gas mixture is not just passed to the first reactor, 25 but also partly added to the gas leaving the first reactor and to the gas leaving the second reactor. Finally, steam is added as a diluent in order to get beyond the thermodynamical carbon deposition boundary. The use of many reactors with their coupled heat-exchangers requires substantial investments, while dilution with steam costs 30 thermal energy.

In order to achieve dissipation of the heat of reaction it is also proposed to recirculate part of the reaction mixture over the catalyst bed. The mixture is cooled after each pass through the reactor. An objection to this procedure is that even with very high feed 35 rates through the reactor the reaction is difficult to control. A slight variation in the gas rate can cause the reactor temperature to rise quickly in places. This in turn results in the catalyst being

deactivated, while damage to the reactor can also occur. For this reason it was proposed to combine recirculation with the use of a number of reactors, using the methane formed as diluent, while the feed is divided over a number of reactors connected in series.

5 These solutions, however, do not produce satisfactory results and are expensive as regards both investment and energy consumption. Nor did it prove very well possible to dissipate the heat by placing the catalyst in effective thermal contact with cooling ribs in the reactor. The commonly used heterogeneous catalysts are not suitable 10 for this purpose. These catalysts have a high porosity and thus possess a low heat-conducting capacity.

A fluidized bed reactor is the most suitable to remove the heat of reaction from the reactor. A. Anderlohr and K. Hedden describe a process in GWF-Gas/Erdgas 118 (1977), pp. 422-426, for methanation 15 and simultaneous conversion of gases rich in carbon monoxide by passing these gases over a nickel catalyst in a fluidized bed. With this method the removal of the thermal energy from the reactor proceeds at a fast rate. Nothing is said here about the nature of the catalyst. In the method described above the catalyst used must not 20 only be active and thermally stable, but it must also be resistant to wear. In the case of a fluidized bed reactor it is furthermore difficult to prevent spreading of the residence time and thus incomplete conversion.

Accelerated carbon deposition is described by W. Lommerzheim and 25 K. Hedden (1st Gas Research Conference, Chicago, page 49) for the case that the H_2/CO ratio is decreased from 4 down to 1. These authors mention the rapid abrasion of their catalyst in a fluidized bed when the H_2/CO ratio is decreased as mentioned. An enhanced formation of fines was observed at low H_2/CO ratios. Apparently 30 carbon deposition decreases the mechanical stability of the catalyst. To avoid carbon deposition steam must be added when the H_2/CO ratio lies below 1.5.

It is still not known how deactivation of the catalysts used for methanation can be effectively counteracted. Even if a substantial 35 excess of hydrogen is applied, deactivation of the catalyst takes place as a result of carbon deposits. According to H. H. Gierlich, M. Fremary, A. Skov and J. R. Rostrup-Nielsen in "Catalyst Deactivation",

Elsevier, Amsterdam (1980), p.459, a fast temperature rise is observed locally in the reactor when a gas mixture consisting of 10,4% by vol. CO₂, 8,6% by vol. CO, 72,5% by vol. H₂ and 0,5 by vol. N₂ is passed over a nickel catalyst. This temperature profile shifts through the reactor as the reaction proceeds. Despite the excess of hydrogen it appeared that carbon had been deposited on the catalyst. This deactivation through carbon deposits proved to take place at a temperature as low as between 300 and 350°C, although the final temperature in the reaction was between 600 and 700°C. This implies that restriction of the temperature rise by fast recirculation or substantial dilution still cannot completely avoid carbon being deposited.

P.K.Agrawal, W.D.Fitzharris and J.R.Katzer describe in "Catalyst Deactivation", Elsevier, Amsterdam (1980), p. 179, that when passing gas mixtures containing 1 and 4% by vol.CO in hydrogen respectively, over a nickel film deposited by evaporation, whilst using a very high recirculation ratio, slow deactivation of the catalyst occurs nevertheless at a temperature of 275°C.

It is known from DE-A-26 06 755 that catalysts comprising exclusively nickel as active component, applied on a carrier, are quickly deactivated during the methanation reaction at H₂/CO ratios of between 1 : 1 and 10 : 1 and at temperatures of between 400 and 600°C.

For this reason it has been suggested to use catalysts containing copper and molybdenum in addition to nickel as active components. Although catalysts of this kind are deactivated less quickly, their initial activity is lower than that of catalysts containing nickel only as an active component.

The deactivation of nickel catalysts in the methanation reaction is also described in DE-A-25 51 958. Carbon deposits are observed at temperatures above 403°C. To counteract this deposition of carbon it is suggested to add hydrogen sulphide to the reaction mixture.

Although adsorption of sulphur compounds poisons the nickel surface, this would allegedly counteract carbon deposits to such an extent that the ultimate stable activity is higher than without the addition of hydrogen sulphide. Nevertheless, adsorption of hydrogen sulphide decreases the activity of the catalyst considerably.

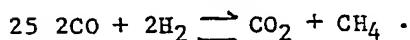
It is also known from DE-A-26 24 396 that in the methanation reaction carbon is deposited on nickel catalysts. Excess of hydrogen is used; for example, a gas mixture is described containing 7.46% by vol. CO and 35.57% by vol. H_2 , while according to another example 5 1% by vol. CO in hydrogen is used.

When feeding the gas to the catalyst the temperature is between 230 and 270°C, while after passing through the catalyst bed the temperature is between 580 and 610°C. In order to counteract carbon deposits the use of nickel-molybdenum catalysts is suggested, which 10 are not subject to rapid deactivation.

It is evident from the above review of the literature that in the production of methane from gas mixtures containing carbon monoxide, which have been obtained, for example, by gasification of coal with oxygen and steam, the removal of catalyst-poisoning compounds, 15 such as sulphur compounds, the carbon monoxide shift reaction and the substantial heat of reaction in methanation present difficulties, which have hitherto not been solved satisfactorily.

In order to solve these problems it is necessary to consider the three processes integrally. There is little sense in improving 20 only one of the elements, e.g. the methanation reaction.

The difficulties mentioned in connection with the removal of catalyst-poisoning compounds in the carbon monoxide shift reaction and in methanation might be solved, if an effective and stable catalyst could be found, suitable for the reaction:



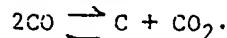
Whereas hitherto, as explained above, the customary methanation process required a H_2/CO ratio of 3, the above mentioned reaction requires a H_2/CO ratio of only 1.

Gasification of coal with a lot of steam and little oxygen produces a raw gas with a H_2/CO ratio of about 2. Sulphur compounds can be separated from the gas and the excess of steam condensed, whereupon the gas can be passed over the catalyst, which accelerates 30 the above reaction.

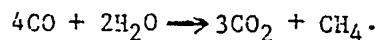
As no shift reaction is used, the gas passed into the sulphur-removal section contains less carbon dioxide. This renders the conversion of the hydrogen sulphide formed to elemental sulphur easier. 35 If the desired catalyst were available, the difficulties encountered

in the processing of raw gas with a H_2/CO ratio of more than 1 would be essentially solved.

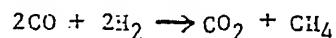
In the gasification of coal at a higher temperature with more oxygen and less steam the above reaction is not possible without appropriate measures. The excess of carbon monoxide reacts according to Boudouard's reaction:



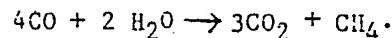
The carbon formed can deactivate the catalyst, while carbon deposits in the reactor can give rise to plugging. When processing a raw gas with a H_2/CO ratio of less than 1, it is necessary to use a catalyst, which also accelerates the following reaction:



After removal of the sulphur compounds it is then only necessary to add a slight quantity of steam to the purified gas. In addition to the reaction:



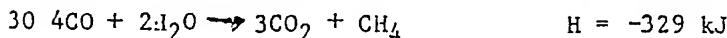
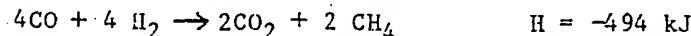
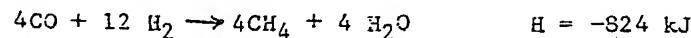
the following reaction proceeds over the catalyst:



Thus, the shift reaction can also be omitted in cases where the gas mixture used for methane production has a low H_2/CO ratio. This improves the thermal efficiency of the methane production from coal, while lower investments in equipment are necessary.

In the production of methane according to the method indicated above the difficulties with respect to the substantial heat of reaction evolved during methanation are also reduced.

The following three reaction equations can be drawn up for methane formation:



Per molecule of carbon monoxide converted the heat evolved during the second and third reactions is much less than in the first reaction, i.e. the "conventional" methanation reaction. This means that the thermal energy liberated in the reactor per unit of volume is greatly reduced at the point where the reaction sets on. As a result the temperature of the reaction mixture rises less quickly, thus causing the reaction rate to rise more gradually. Consequently,

the heat of reaction is liberated in a larger reactor volume, the local temperature rise is kept down and the catalyst deactivation is reduced.

In the foregoing attention was drawn on a number of occasions as 5 to the risk of carbon being deposited on the catalyst. It is known that in a lot of cases mixtures of hydrogen and carbon monoxide are processed under conditions which make the carbon deposition thermodynamically probable. In J.Chem.Soc. (1929), pp. 1903-1913, it was described even then that the rate at which graphite is formed is very 10 low. In the case of carbon being formed this substance occurs in a thermodynamically far less stable form. Hence, it is possible to operate in a range where graphite is thermodynamically stable, provided any carbon formed is quickly converted into gaseous products before the slow transition into the more stable graphite can take 15 place.

In the previously mentioned article in GWF-Gas/Erdgas 118 (1977), pp. 422-426, it is stated that in the conversion of synthetic gases at a temperature of 430°C increasing carbon deposits are observed when the H_2/CO ratio is reduced from 3 to 1.5. When lowering this ratio to 1, the filter present in the reactor is blocked with soot.

Several publications are also known, in which it is stated that the shift reaction and the methanation reaction can occur simultaneously on a catalyst.

25 Reference may be made to a publication by B.J.Koch, H.Yoon and W.B. Carter in Coal Tech., Houston 1979, pp. 52-80, in which the above mentioned reactions are discussed. However, no information is given about the catalyst or its stability nor of the composition of the gas mixture being processed.

30 The combination of the shift and methanation reactions is discussed in more detail in an article in Hydrocarbon Processing of April 1981, pp. 114-118 and the US-A-4,133,825. It is known from these references that a synthesis gas containing carbon monoxide and hydrogen is simultaneously heated and saturated with water, whereupon 35 the gas stream is divided into two or more streams. The first stream is mixed with recirculated product gas and then passed over a catalyst at 250 to 550°C. The product of this first reaction is mixed

with the second stream and the mixture is again passed over a catalyst at 250 to 550°C. The product gas is partly recirculated to the first reactor. If desired, steam can also be added to the saturated primary gas. The gas mixture processed has a H₂/CO ratio of 5 0.4. However, no information is given about the catalysts used nor about their stability.

In FR-A-2,256,234 a process has been described for the production of methane in which process a gas stream containing hydrogen and carbon monoxide in a ratio of from 0.5 to 1.15 is mixed with 10 water to bring the molar percentage of the water in the gas stream at a volume of from 0.1 to 15.0, the resulting gas stream is preheated to a temperature in the range of from 149°C to 538°C and thereafter subjected to methanation to form a gas mixture which has a high methane content. Nothing is said in this specification about the 15 catalyst stability towards carbon (whisker) formation. From experiments, however, it appears that the stability of the catalysts used therein is bad and will give rise to numerous problems in the operation of the process.

It is an object of this invention the improve the process for 20 the preparation of methane from gas mixtures containing hydrogen and/or steam and at least 5% by volume of carbon monoxide in such a way, that the process can be carried out over long time periods without carbon deposition and catalyst deactivation. Another object of the invention is to improve the process in such a way that the 25 H₂/CO ratio can be selected in wide ranges and particularly with high methane production selectivity, especially if the H₂-content is low.

It has been found that these objects can be accomplished in a process for the preparation of methane from gas mixtures containing 30 hydrogen and/or steam and at least 5% by volume of carbon monoxide by means of an nickel catalyst, which contains on a thermally stable oxidic carrier metallic nickel particles as an active catalyst component, if according to the invention the metallic nickel particles are chemically bonded to the thermally stable oxidic carrier.

35 As thermally stable oxidic carriers there can be used according to the invention the compounds, which according to the state of the art are used as carriers for catalysts in many fields. Such carriers

have a large specific surface area. Non-restrictive examples for such carriers are alumina, silica, magnesia, silica-alumina, silica-magnesia, zirconia, silica-zirconia, titania, silica-zirconia-titania, crystalline or amorphous alumina silicate molecular sieves and metal phosphates. According to the invention zirconia and magnesia, but especially alumina and silica are preferred.

The element or elements, the oxides of which are used as carriers according to the invention, e.g. aluminum or silicon, are defined hereinafter for the sake of simplicity as carrier base element or elements.

If silica is used as a carrier, commercially available products may be used, such as Aerosil (registered trade mark). Other carriers may also be used in the form of their commercially available products.

15 According to a preferred embodiment of the invention the chemical bond between the metallic nickel particles and the oxidic carrier is provided by an interfacial layer different from the oxidic carrier, which layer consists of a compound containing oxygen and at least one member selected from the group consisting of nickel and the 20 carrier base element or elements.

Generally the interfacial layer consists of
a) a compound containing nickel ions, or
b) a stable non-stoichiometric oxide of the carrier base element or elements, or
25 c) a compound containing nickel and the carrier base element or elements.

If the carrier is an oxide of a carrier base element or elements, which form(s) only stoichiometric oxides, the interfacial layer contains nickel ions. If, on the other hand, the carrier is an 30 oxide of a carrier base element or elements, which can form a stable non-stoichiometric oxide, the interfacial layer comprises such non-stoichiometric oxides and may in addition comprise nickel ions.

As carrier base element or elements, which form(s) only stoichiometric oxides, preferably at least one member of the group consisting of Si, Al and Mg is used.

The interfacial layer is very thin and usually has a thickness between 0.2 and 10 nm, preferably between 0.5 and 5 nm. In fact this

interfacial layer has a thickness of only a few atoms. It is extremely important that essentially all of the metallic nickel particles of the catalyst are chemically bonded to the carrier as described in the above. The metallic nickel particles of the active catalyst do not form a continuous layer, but are individual particles which are chemically bonded to the carrier.

It has been observed that, if the active catalyst contains appreciable amounts of metallic nickel particles which are not chemically bonded to the carrier, these particles will give rise to the formation of carbon whiskers in a gas atmosphere containing a high percentage of CO. Therefore, it is preferred that in the catalyst used in the process of the invention per cm^3 of the catalyst bed there is not more than 0.05 g, preferably not more than 0.03 g and most preferably not more than 0.01 g metallic nickel, which is not chemically bonded to the carrier, e.g. through the interfacial layer.

Preferably the nickel particles size distribution in the catalyst used in the process of the invention is such that less than 10% by volume of the particles is smaller than 2 nm and less than 20 % by volume of the particles is larger than 30 nm.

Nickel is mostly precipitated on the oxidic carriers in the form of hydroxide or oxide. The hydroxide or oxide is not, however, catalytically active for the above reactions, so that it has to be reduced to nickel metal. The most obvious way of effecting a chemical bond would be partial reduction of the nickel hydroxide or nickel oxide primarily fixed on the carrier. The nickel particle thus formed is chemically bonded by the remaining nickel oxide, which in turn is bonded by the carrier. There is a problem, however, in that the reduction of a nickel oxide particle, once started, tends to proceed fast until the particle is fully reduced to nickel metal. Part of the nickel ions should be supplied in a form which is reducible more slowly than the pure oxide. To achieve this purpose the nickel ions could be reacted with the carrier into a compound, which is less readily reduced or alternatively a carrier could be used, which can be partially reduced. In the latter case reduction of the carrier material produces metal atoms, often alloyed with nickel, which strongly interact with both the nickel and the carrier.

Reaction of at least part of the nickel ions with the carrier material to form a compound which is less readily reduced than the nickel hydroxide or nickel oxide, can be achieved with SiO_2 as a carrier. For instance, a suspension of SiO_2 in a solution of nickel salt could be taken, to which an alkaline compound is added in excess over the dissolved nickel ions. If the suspension is then stirred for some time, at elevated temperature if needed, before filtering and drying the loaded carrier, the SiO_2 carrier reacts to some extent into nickel hydrosilicate. The portion of the SiO_2 reacting into hydrosilicate varies with the reactivity of the SiO_2 used and with the excess of alkaline compound used.

A more complete reaction of SiO_2 into hydrosilicate is obtained by coprecipitation of nickel and SiO_2 , as described by Van Eijck, Van Voorthuijsen and Franzen In Rec. Trav. Chim. 70 (1951) p. 15 793. According to this method a solution of water glass is thoroughly mixed with a solution of nickel salt, resulting in a more or less complete reaction to form nickel hydrosilicate. Generally the nickel hydrosilicate crystallizes into relatively large, plate-shaped crystallites. Reduction of the coprecipitated material produces nickel particles which adhere very well to the remaining SiO_2 , which still contains nickel ions. Catalysts prepared according to this method are suitable for the process of the invention.

Referring in more general terms to the methods of preparation of the nickel catalysts useful in the process of the invention it has been found that these nickel catalysts are obtainable by one of the following methods, which are given by the way of example only. These methods comprise:

a) mixing an aqueous solution of a nickel salt and an aqueous solution of a salt of the base element or elements, the oxide of 30 which is the thermally stable oxidic carrier, raising the pH-value up to a level where the dissolved nickel and base element or elements ions have been substantially completely precipitated, ageing, if required, the precipitate in the solution, separating, hydrothermally treating, if required, and drying, calcinating and reducing the precipitate, or

b) mixing an aqueous solution of a nickel salt and an aqueous solution of a salt of the base element or elements, the oxide of

which is the thermally stable oxidic carrier, with an aqueous solution of an oxalate or formate, separating, drying, calcinating and reducing the precipitate, or

5 c) suspending in a finely divided form the thermally stable oxidic carrier in a dilute aqueous solution of a nickel salt and precipitating a nickel compound at an elevated temperature and with vigorous agitation by forming hydroxyl ions by a chemical reaction, which is known per se, of compounds contained also in the solution, not faster than this is the case by hydrolysis of an aqueous solution 10 of urea, which is present in the solution in an amount of 1 to 10 times the amount stoichiometrically required, followed by separating, calcinating and reducing the loaded carrier, or

15 d) suspending in a finely divided form the thermally stable oxidic carrier in a dilute aqueous solution of a nickel salt, raising the pH value of the resulting suspension by injection of hydroxyl ions below the surface of the vigorously agitated suspension and separating, hydrothermally treating, if required, drying, calcinating, if required, and reducing the loaded carrier, or

20 e) introducing into the suspension of the thermally stable oxidic carrier a nickel salt solution under the surface of the suspension while keeping the pH value of the suspension between 4 and 7, separating, drying, calcinating and reducing the loaded carrier.

The method referred to under c) hereinabove is known as such from DE-C-17 67 202. In this way highly suitable catalysts can be 25 obtained. It has also been stated in DE-C-17 67 202 that nickel catalysts thus prepared can be used for methanation of the small quantities of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide which are present in the gas for the synthesis of ammonia. This relates to the methanation of tiny quantities of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide (about 0.1% 30 by vol.) present in a hydrogen/nitrogen mixture. It cannot be inferred, however, from said reference, that these catalysts would be suitable for the production of methane from gas mixtures obtained by coal gasification.

It should be noted here that in EU-A-0028835 a two stage process 35 for the production of methane has been described, in the first stage of which a mixture containing 25 to 90 % by vol. of hydrogen as well as carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide is passed over a nickel catalyst

at a temperature of from 250°C to 550°C to produce a methane rich gas product. For this process the nickel catalyst described in DE-C-17 67 202 may be used. However, the starting gas mixture is obtained by subjecting a gas resulting from coal gasification to the carbon 5 monoxide shift reaction and optionally to a carbon dioxide removal step. Generally the gas mixture contains 5 to 25 % by vol. of carbon monoxide, the H₂/CO ratio being in practice 2.5 to 5. It has not been recognized in EU-A-0028835 that gas mixtures having a relatively low hydrogen content and H₂/CO ratio and a relatively high CO 10 content could be converted in one step (therefore without a separate carbon monoxide shift reaction step) into a gaseous product containing predominantly methane, thus making possible an economic production of methane from coal as outlined in the above without being confronted with carbon deposits on the catalyst and in the 15 reactor.

As a matter of fact the above methods of preparing nickel catalysts have been mentioned by way of illustration. Other nickel catalysts meeting the above description can also be used in the process according to the present invention. In particular it has 20 been found that Ni/SiO₂ catalysts are highly suitable for the conversion of carbon monoxide with hydrogen and with steam if part of the nickel is still present in the form of Ni(II) ions.

Several nickel catalysts are known, which have been prepared in a very specific way, but which appeared not to be suitable for the 25 process of the invention, although their use for the methanation of gas mixtures containing carbon monoxide has been described. Reference may be made to FR-A-1,074,037. According to this reference an aqueous solution of nickel salt and magnesium salt is introduced into a boiling solution of alkali metal carbonate in such an amount that the 30 pH-value of the solution obtained after precipitation is between 8 and 11. Thereafter kieselguhr or an analogous carrier is added to the resulting suspension, which is agitated until all carbon dioxide is set free. Finally the precipitated mass is thoroughly washed with water. According to NL-A-71 17 619 a nickel catalyst is precipitated 35 in an aqueous suspension formed by an aqueous solution of the nickel salt, an aqueous solution of the alkali metal carbonate and a carrier material, such as silica, which suspension is maintained during the

complete or substantially complete precipitation at a temperature between 75°C and 95°C and at a pH-value of 3.0 to 10. When using the method of preparation of nickel catalysts as described in FR-A-1,074,037 and NL-A-71 17 619 nickel catalysts are obtained in which there is no sufficient chemical bond between the nickel particles and the carrier, so that the catalysts are not suitable for use in the process of the invention.

In one of the above mentioned methods employed to achieve a strong interaction between the nickel particles and the carrier material in the catalysts used in the process of the invention use was made of a carrier, which is to be partially reduced. The compounds or metal atoms produced in reducing the carrier show strong interaction with both the nickel particles and the carrier. An example of such a carrier is TiO_2 . When heated in a reducing gas TiO_2 is reduced to a TiO_x oxide wherein x has a value below 2.

The oxide reduced at the interface of the nickel particles ensures a strong bond of the nickel particles to the carrier, provided the nickel has been deposited homogeneously over the carrier and in intimate contact with it. When catalysts are prepared as described in FR-A-2,347,323 by impregnation of nickel metal upon the carrier, drying and subsequent heat treatment of the loaded carrier, the active material is inhomogeneously distributed over the carrier. Especially at more elevated metal loadings, this leads to large nickel clusters, which interact only to a limited extent with the carrier. The interaction of these "loose" particles with the carrier remains small even after partial reduction of the carrier. Therefore catalysts prepared according to FR-A-2,347,323 are not suitable for use in the process of the invention.

In the nickel catalysts used in the process of the invention the presence of an interfacial layer containing nickel ions can be established in several ways. The oxidation state of nickel in catalysts of this type is normally II. According to one method first the total nickel content of the catalyst is determined, e.g. by means of atomic absorption spectrometry. Next the amount of metallic nickel per unit weight of catalyst can be found by measuring the saturation magnetisation of the catalyst sample. The saturation magnetisation found is a direct measure of the amount of metallic nickel present.

The difference between the total amount of nickel and the amount of metallic nickel represents the amount of nickel that is present in the interfacial layer in the form of Ni (II) ions.

Alternatively the nickel content that is present as nickel ions in the interfacial layer can be established by measuring the consumption of hydrogen during reduction of the catalyst in a H₂ containing atmosphere at temperatures that are also used during the catalyst operation. Subsequently the consumption measured is compared with the volume of hydrogen that would be required for complete reduction of all nickel ions present. From the difference between the two values found the amount of Ni (II) ions can be calculated.

A third way to establish the presence of Ni (II) ions in the active catalyst is to measure the increase in weight of a catalyst sample, that previously has been reduced under reaction conditions, during reoxidation of the sample in a O₂-containing atmosphere.

When after reduction part of the nickel is present in the form of Ni(II) ions, the uptake of O₂ and hence the increase in weight will be smaller during reoxidation than when after reduction all nickel has been reduced. Comparison of the actual increase in weight with the theoretical increase calculated from the total amount of nickel in the sample yields information on the amount of nickel that is present as Ni (II) ions in the interfacial layer in the active catalyst under reaction conditions.

Preferably catalysts used in the process of the invention contain nickel ions in the interfacial layer in an amount of at least 5%, preferably at least 10%, more preferably at least 20% by weight of the total amount of nickel in the catalyst.

When the catalysts have been prepared as indicated above using SiO₂ as a carrier a homogeneous distribution of the nickel over the support is achieved. Hence a strong bonding occurs between the highly dispersed nickel particles and the partially reduced carrier, even at high nickel loadings. The presence of a partially reduced carrier under conditions of the reaction can be established in the active catalyst in two ways. According to one method the metallic nickel content of the catalyst is determined by measuring the saturation magnetisation of a sample of known weight, which previously has been reduced under reaction conditions. Afterwards the sample is

reoxidised in an O_2 -containing atmosphere and simultaneously the increase in weight owing to oxidation of the metallic nickel and, if partially reduced, of the carrier is measured. By comparing the actual increase in weight with the increase that would be expected 5 from oxidation of the metallic nickel only, the extent of reduction of the support can be calculated. In the catalysts used in the process of the invention the increase in weight during oxidation should exceed the increase exclusively caused by oxidation of the nickel metal by at least 10%, preferably by at least 20%.

10 Alternatively, the extent of reduction of the carrier can be determined by measuring the consumption of H_2 during reduction of the completely re-oxidised catalyst in a H_2 -containing atmosphere at temperatures that are also used in the process of this invention. Subsequently, the consumption measured is compared with the amount 15 of H_2 that would be required to yield the amount of nickel which eventually is present as metallic nickel particles in the reduced catalyst. The amount of metallic nickel in the catalyst can be calculated, as indicated above, from a measurement of the saturation magnetisation. From the difference between the actually measured 20 H_2 -volume and the volume exclusively required for reduction of the nickel in the oxidised form the extent of reduction of the carrier can be determined.

In the catalysts used in the process of the invention the H_2 consumption during reduction of the catalyst should exceed the con-25 sumption exclusively required for reduction of the oxidic nickel by at least 10%, preferably by at least 20%.

The relative amount of particles, bonded to the carrier through an interfacial layer can be determined in the following three ways:

1. A sample of the reduced active catalyst is investigated in 30 the electron microscope in order to count the number of metallic nickel particles per gram of catalyst as well as their average size. A similar sample is treated with pure CO at ambient or higher pressure at a temperature between 60 and 100°C for such a time period as is required to remove all metallic nickel from the catalyst by 35 formation of gaseous $Ni(CO)_4$. Thus only the nickel that is present as ionic nickel in the interfacial layers remains in the catalyst. By electron microscopic investigation the number of interfacial layers -

of roughly the same surface size as the original metallic particles - can be counted per gram of catalyst. For a catalyst according to the invention, this number should essentially equal the number, found for the number of metallic nickel particles per gram of catalyst. From the differences between the number of nickel metal particles and the number of nickel interfaces, the amount of "free" or "loose" nickel particles and the weight quantity of "loose" metallic nickel can be calculated.

2. A sample of the reduced active catalyst is treated with a 10 mixture of 90% by volume of N_2 and 10% by volume of CO at ambient pressure at a temperature of $400^\circ C$ for a time period of between 10 and 60 hours. The sample is then cooled down and passivated. Electron microscopic investigation will then show, depending on whether the catalyst is suitable according to the invention or not, that carbon 15 whiskers have been formed. These carbon whiskers are only formed at "loose" metallic nickel particles which are not bonded to the carrier. Thus, the amount of these unbonded particles per gram of catalyst material can be found.

3. In case the carrier material consists of an oxide of a base 20 element which is partially reducible, the unbonded nickel particles can be quantitatively determined by currently available electron microscopic methods.

It has been found that only a small amount of non-chemically bonded nickel can be allowed in the catalysts used in this invention. 25 This amount should not exceed 50 mg, more preferably 30 mg and most preferably 10 mg per cm^3 of the catalyst bed, as pointed out already above. When the amount of unbonded nickel exceeds such amounts, the catalyst bed will gradually be plugged due to the growth of carbon whiskers, which already have been discussed above. It was 30 established, that very large nickel particles of dimensions of about 100 nm are slowly deactivated under reaction conditions. Nickel particles of such a large size often contain grain boundaries. It is known (Carbon (1972), pages 601 to 611) that at these grain boundaries carbon can be deposited due to which the particles are broken 35 up. The growth of carbon whiskers continues after the nickel particles have been fragmented, which eventually results in reactor plugging. However, nickel particles of dimensions smaller than 30 nm

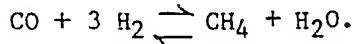
generally do not contain grain boundaries. Hence, whisker growth induced by grain boundaries will not occur in these particles. Therefore the catalyst should preferably contain less than 10% by volume of nickel particles larger than 30 nm.

5 The nickel particle size distribution can be determined by electron microscope study. Another, faster and more accurate method of determining the particle size distribution is by means of magnetism.

Magnetization is measured as a function of the field strength 10 and the particle size distribution is so computed that the experimental magnetization curve is reproduced. It appears that the computed curve produces an unambiguous particle size distribution, corresponding with the distribution found by means of electron microscope examination.

15 When carbon is intentionally deposited on a catalyst used according to the present invention by passing pure CO over the catalyst at 275°C, and the carbon is then removed by heating the catalyst in a hydrogen stream at temperatures up to 450°C, it appears that the nickel particle size distribution has not significantly 20 changed. This proves that no carbon has been deposited between the nickel particles and the carrier. On the contrary it has been found that in regenerating conventional catalysts in which carbon has been deposited between the nickel particles and the carrier, far bigger nickel particles are formed than the particles that were present in 25 the original catalyst.

When using the nickel catalysts of the invention methane can be produced from gas mixtures with a wide variety of carbon monoxide contents. For instance, gas mixtures can be used which contain far less hydrogen than the amount needed for the classical methanation 30 reaction:



Conversion of gas mixtures with a high CO content proved to be possible. This is quite surprising, as it is generally known from the literature referred to above that so far catalyst deactivation by 35 carbon deposition has always occurred in converting gas mixtures with a relatively high carbon monoxide content by means of nickel catalysts.

Moreover, it was found that in using the nickel catalysts according to the present invention, carbon monoxide can be quantitatively converted with steam into methane and carbon dioxide in the absence of hydrogen. Such a reaction has been hitherto unknown.

5 If gas mixtures are used which contain carbon monoxide, hydrogen and water, the carbon monoxide is converted almost quantitatively into methane by use of the nickel catalysts according to the present invention.

An additional advantage of the nickel catalysts used according 10 to the present invention is their low onset temperature. For example, a gas mixture of 50% by vol. of hydrogen and 50% by vol. of carbon monoxide was quantitatively converted into methane and carbon dioxide at 230°C using a nickel catalyst according to the present invention.

A low onset temperature of the catalyst is of major importance in 15 performing the present reactions since they are all highly exothermic. The exothermic reactions generally produce a rapid and sharp temperature rise in the reactors. If the reaction starts at a relatively low temperature, the maximum temperature in the reactor can also be kept at a lower temperature. The drawbacks of elevated 20 temperatures are the necessity of adapting the reactor construction, the high demands made on the thermal stability of the catalysts and the less favourable thermodynamic equilibrium position of the above reaction.

Though in the process according to the present invention the 25 quantity of heat released per reacting molecule of carbon monoxide is smaller than in the usual methanation process, the temperature of the reaction mixture may in certain cases rise to an unacceptable level. This applies to mixtures which apart from carbon monoxide contain either hydrogen or steam, or both hydrogen and steam.

30 In such cases the gas mixture containing carbon monoxide can be diluted with carbon dioxide before it is passed over the nickel catalyst.

Part of the heat of reaction released is then absorbed by the carbon dioxide. Together with the carbon dioxide formed by reaction 35 the diluting carbon dioxide is separated out after the reaction by dissolving it under pressure in a liquid. For this kind of carbon dioxide removal technologically advanced and reliable processes are

available. After separation of the carbon dioxide from the gas by means of the liquid the carbon dioxide is removed from the liquid by reducing the pressure and supplying some thermal energy. Part of the carbon dioxide recovered can be recirculated to the initial gas mixture, thus eliminating the need to produce carbon dioxide separately as a diluent. Carbon dioxide supply does not entail incorporation of an additional separating unit either, since the carbon dioxide produced by the reaction should be removed anyway. The presence of carbon dioxide proves to be no detriment to the activity of the catalyst.

The initial gas mixture can also be diluted with methane to absorb part of the heat produced.

Apart from the molar CO-concentration in the gas, the molar H₂/CO-ratio is at least equally important for the process according to the invention. Whereas the "classical" methanation reaction requires an H₂/CO ratio of at least 3 for proper process operation, in the process according to the invention the molar H₂/CO-ratio can be lower than 2.45. We have found that when using the specially defined catalysts according to the invention, an H₂/CO ratio below 1.15 will also give very good conversion results. Here, the advantages of the invention even become more pronounced than with higher H₂/CO ratios because of the more severe circumstances. Catalysts used until now will rapidly deactivate by deposition of carbon as has been shown in experiments. In addition, we have found it to be quite surprising, that even with extremely low H₂/CO ratios, i.e. below 0.4, 0.3, 0.2 or even 0.1, the catalysts, in which metallic nickel particles are chemically bonded to an oxidic carrier, give good conversion results. If the H₂/CO ratio of the gas mixture is about 0.9 to 1.1 the initial gas mixture should preferably be mixed with a quantity of steam corresponding to at least 10 mol % related to the carbon monoxide present. In using gas mixtures with H₂/CO ratios below 0.9 it proved to be desirable to add more steam. It was found that the quantity of steam required for a satisfactory performance of the process is at least 50 mol % related to the difference between the number of moles of carbon monoxide and the number of moles of hydrogen. This can be expressed in the following formula:



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moles H_2O = [(0.5 to 0.6) x moles CO] minus [0.5 x moles H_2].

The temperatures at which the conversions can be carried out range from 230°C to 700°C. More specifically these temperatures lie in the range of from 230°C to 600°C and advantageously from 230°C to 550°C. The pressures at which the conversions can be carried out range from 100 to 10,000 kPa, more specifically from 500 to 8,000 kPa and advantageously from 1,500 to 4,500 kPa. Before according to the process of this invention the gas mixture is passed over the catalyst, it is substantially freed of sulphur compounds. If in re-10 moving sulphur compounds from the gas mixture steam condenses it need not be supplemented as for methanation little or no steam is required. Further, the CO_2 -content of the mixture entering the de-sulphurization plant is lower than in the case where first a shift reaction has been performed.

15 The process according to the invention can, for instance, be carried out with excellent results in an apparatus as described in US-A-4,133,825. This use is only mentioned as an example, however, because it has been found that in using the nickel catalysts according to the present invention all gas mixtures can be handled 20 which contain more than 5% by vol. of carbon monoxide. In general the carbon monoxide content of the gas mixtures to be treated will be from 5 - 80% by vol. As explained above, however, the catalysts are especially useful for the production of methane from raw gas mixtures with relatively high carbon monoxide contents, at least more than 25 10-20% and preferably more than 25% by vol.

The process according to the invention can also be carried out in a fluidized bed. In the already mentioned paper by W. Lommerzheim and K. Hedden (1st Gas Research Conference, Chicago, page 49) it was noted that carbon deposition leads to a decreased mechanical strength 30 of the catalyst. Since with a catalyst according to the invention, abrasion due to carbon deposition is avoided, it is very favourable to use such a catalyst in a fluidized-bed process aimed at the conversion of high-CO, low H_2/CO -ratio feed gas to form methane (and carbondioxide).

35 The following examples are given as a further illustration of the invention but do not limit its scope. Example I describes the preparation of the nickel catalyst which is used in examples II to

VIII for the production of methane from gas mixtures.

Example I.

43.6 g $\text{Ni}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ was dissolved in 1 litre of water in which 9 g silica (trade mark Aerosil of Degussa), having a surface area of $380 \text{ m}^2/\text{g}$ had been suspended. The temperature of the vigorously agitated suspension was then raised to 90°C and the solution acidified dropwise with nitric acid to a pH of 2.

Subsequently 27.0 g of urea was added, as a result of which the pH value gradually rose and nickel was deposited on the silica. The loaded carrier was then separated from the liquid, dried at 120°C , pressed and cut into pieces of sizes ranging from 1.5 to 2.5 mm.

Afterwards the pieces were dehydrated in a nitrogen stream at a temperature up to 450°C and reduced in a stream of 10% hydrogen in argon at 450°C for at least 80 hours. Before the tests described in example II to VIII were carried out the catalyst was freed from adsorbed hydrogen in a nitrogen stream at 450°C for 2 hours. The nickel particle size distribution of the catalyst thus obtained is shown in table A.

Table A.

Fraction, % by vol.:	Diameter, nm
0	<2.5
3.40	2.69
5.30	2.90
2.89	3.13
7.17	3.37
10.67	3.63
6.44	3.91
9.12	4.22
3.20	4.54
1.60	4.90
7.33	5.27
4.28	5.68
8.43	6.12
5.68	6.60
7.15	7.11
5.10	7.66
3.61	8.26
3.13	8.90
0.00	9.58
0.00	10.3
0.00	11.1
4.22	12.0
1.28	12.9
0	>13

After this catalyst had been used in three tests, in which carbon from carbon monoxide was deposited at 275°C and subsequently removed again with hydrogen at temperatures rising to 450°C, the nickel particle size distribution was again determined. The result is shown in table B.

Table B.

	Fraction, % by vol.	Diameter, nm
	0	<3
10	7.29	3.04
	6.05	3.31
	6.73	3.60
	6.95	3.92
	4.59	4.26
15	5.57	4.63
	4.98	5.04
	0.0	5.48
	2.97	5.96
	5.07	6.48
20	9.12	7.05
	8.37	7.66
	8.03	8.33
	7.22	9.06
	5.94	9.86
25	4.50	10.7
	3.15	11.7
	3.47	12.7
	0	>13

Example II.

Two series of experiments were carried out on laboratory scale using the catalyst prepared according to example I. In the A series a catalyst bed with a length of 2.5 cm was filled with a catalyst containing 1.15 g of nickel in total. For the tests of the A series the carbon monoxide and the hydrogen were diluted with nitrogen.

The nitrogen was found to have no effect on the catalyst activity. In test 1 of the A series a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide ($H_2/CO = 1.3$) was passed through the reactor at a temperature of $285^\circ C$.

5 After about 1 hour a stationary condition was reached in which the carbon monoxide was fully converted. After termination of the test, i.e. after 48 hours, no reduction of catalyst activity was observed.

In various tests of the A series the gas mixture was saturated 10 with water by passing it through a saturator at a rate of 50 ml/minute, before the gas mixture was passed over the catalyst. In the saturator the gas bubbled through a thermostatically controlled water reservoir with 13 cm head of water.

In test 2 of the A series the conversion at $280^\circ C$ of carbon monoxide with steam, i.e. without hydrogen, was examined. In the 15 stationary condition a mixture of CO_2 and CH_4 was obtained with a CO_2/CH_4 ratio of 3. In this test, too, complete conversion of the carbon monoxide and no deactivation was found, nor was deactivation observed in any of the other tests of the A series.

20 Tests 5, 6a and 7 of the A series showed that under virtually identical conditions the conversion of carbon monoxide and hydrogen decreased at a rise of temperature. Tests 5, 6a and 7 of the A series also showed that under virtually identical conditions the CO_2/CH_4 ratio of the product gas increased from 0.8 at $400^\circ C$ to 1.2 at $500^\circ C$.
25 At a temperature of $470^\circ C$ the conversion of carbon monoxide was found to be raised by increasing the partial water pressure. In the B series a catalyst bed with a length of 15.0 cm was used which had been filled with a catalyst containing 5.4 g of nickel.

The gas mixture used in the B series was not diluted with nitrogen. In spite of the increased partial pressure of the carbon monoxide the catalyst showed no sign of deactivation after 72 hours of continuous operation.

Whereas in the A series the carbon monoxide conversion rapidly decreased at temperatures below $265^\circ C$, carbon monoxide conversion in 35 the B series proved still complete at $230^\circ C$ (B series, test f).

The results of the tests are listed in table C.

Table G.

Test	Reactor	Reaction components			Saturator			Products			Duration (h)		
		temperature (°C)	(% by vol. on dry basis)	T (°C)	P (kPa)	CH ₄	CO ₂	H ₂	CO	N ₂			
A series	1	285	10.7	8.1	81.2	-	-	5.5	2.8	0.4	-	91.3	48
	2	280	-	8.6	91.4	38	6.67	2.2	6.6	-	-	91.2	24
	3	285	9.9	18.3	71.8	41	7.73	7.9	10.9	0.7	-	80.5	40
	4	280	5.4	14.6	80.0	47	10.67	5.0	8.9	0.6	-	85.5	45
	5	400	11.2	9.9	78.9	16	1.87	5.4	4.5	3.2	0.4	86.5	48
	6a	470	8.5	8.5	83.0	14	1.60	2.8	3.3	4.1	2.0	87.8	(2)
	b	470	8.2	8.2	83.6	-	-	3.0	2.7	2.9	2.4	89.0	(18)
c	c	470	8.4	8.2	83.4	30	4.27	2.8	3.9	5.2	1.5	86.6	(2)
	d	470	8.4	8.1	83.5	43	8.66	2.7	4.3	6.0	1.2	85.8	(2)
	e	470	8.4	8.1	83.5	52	13.6	2.6	4.2	6.1	1.1	86.0	(2)
	f	470	8.5	6.1	85.4	-	-	2.8	2.0	3.4	1.6	90.2	44 (18)
	7	500	9.1	8.5	82.4	16	1.87	2.5	3.1	6.3	2.7	85.4	72
B series	la	275	52.5	47.5	-	20	2.40	49.1	50.2	0.7	-	-	(18)
	b	250	52.5	47.5	-	20	2.40	50.4	49.6	-	-	-	(2)
	c	427	52.5	47.5	-	20	2.40	44.8	47.4	7.1	0.7	-	(2)
	d	427	53.4	46.6	-	29	4.00	44.4	47.0	8.0	0.6	-	(2)
	e	427	53.7	46.3	-	35	5.60	44.3	46.0	8.7	1.0	-	(2)
	f	230	52.8	47.2	-	21	2.53	49.3	49.6	1.1	-	-	74 (48)

Example III.

In the process according to this example use was made of an apparatus as schematically represented in figure 1 of the drawings. A mixture of 50% by vol. of hydrogen and 50% by vol. of carbon monoxide was supplied through line 1 at a rate of 44.6 mol/h, a pressure of 2200 kPa and a temperature of 420°C to mixing unit 2, in which it was mixed with a gas mixture consisting of 5.5 mol H₂, 1.2 mol CO, 14.3 mol CH₄, 16.4 mol CO₂ and 0.3 mol H₂O and having a temperature of 71°C. The mixture leaving mixing unit 2 was heated up to 250°C in heater 3 and it was passed in reactor 4 over a catalyst prepared in the way as described in example I. The mixture leaving the reactor through line 5 consisted of 9.9 mol H₂, 16.7 mol CO, 20 mol CH₄, 16.5 mol CO₂ and 6 mol H₂O, and had a temperature of 700°C. In mixing unit 6 this mixture was mixed with 34.9 mol H₂O which were supplied through line 7 at a temperature of 15°C and a pressure of 2500 kPa. The mixture obtained in unit 6, the temperature of which was 250°C, was then passed in reactor 8 over a similar catalyst as used in reactor 4. The product leaving reactor 8 through line 9 at a temperature of 550°C consisted of 9.1 mol H₂, 2 mol CO, 23.8 mol CH₄, 27.4 mol CO₂ and 33.8 mol H₂O. In heat exchanger 10 the product was cooled down to 250°C and in cooler 11 it was further cooled with water to 45°C.

In cooling down 33.3 mol water condensed which was drained off through line 12.

25 The remainder of the product was discharged through line 13, 40% by vol. being carried off through line 14 as product and 60% by vol. being recirculated via line 15, compressor 16 (the pressure being raised from 1520 to 2160 kPa) and line 17 to feed line 1.

30 The product consisted of 44.5% by vol. of H₂, 3.1% by vol. of CO, 37.9% by vol. of CH₄, 43.6% by vol. of CO₂ and 0.8% by vol. of H₂O.

In using the same product but recirculating 70% of the product the final temperature in reactor 4 was 642°C and in reactor 8 485°C. In this case 38.9 mol water were supplied through line 7 and 33 mol water were drained off through line 12.

35 The composition of the final product was then 3.1% by vol. of H₂, 1.3% by vol. of CO, 43.2% by vol. of CH₄, 46.6% by vol. of

CO₂ and 0.9% by vol. of H₂O.

The term "mol" used in this example is not to be understood as an absolute value; it is just an indication of the relative quantities of the components.

5 Example IV.

A cylindrical reactor tube made of stainless steel was filled with a sample of the catalyst prepared and pretreated as described in Example I. The catalyst bed was 1.8 cm in diameter and 17 cm in height. The catalyst sample in the reactor contained 6.3 g of reduced 10 nickel. A gas mixture comprising 15% by volume of H₂, 10% by volume of CO and 75% by volume of N₂ was passed through the catalyst bed at a space velocity of 1500 hr⁻¹ and a total pressure of 600 kPa. During the experiment the temperature of the catalyst bed was measured continuously at nine heights in the bed. The temperature of 15 the reaction mixture at the entrance of the bed was 250°C, while the temperature at the exit of the poorly isolated laboratory reactor was 230°C. To establish whether catalyst plugging (owing to carbon deposition) occurred the pressure drop over the catalyst bed was recorded continuously. The experiment was continued over a prolonged 20 period of about 1000 hr. The product gas, the composition of which did not change throughout the experiment, consisted of 6.9% by volume of CH₄, 4.1% by volume of CO₂, 0.2% by volume of CO, 0.0% H₂, H₂O (not determined quantitatively) and N₂. At the end of the experiment catalyst activity had not decreased and no increase in 25 pressure drop had been observed. The pressure drop being at a constant low level indicated that severe carbon deposition and catalyst plugging had not occurred.

By way of comparison the experiment described hereinbefore was repeated, but now with a commercially available methanation catalyst, 30 Marshaw Ni 6458. The reactor was loaded with 41.4 g of this catalyst, which was pretreated according to prescriptions of the manufacturer. Subsequently, the reaction mixture consisting of 15% by volume of H₂, 10% by volume of CO and 75% by volume of N₂ was passed through the catalyst bed at a space velocity of 1500 hr⁻¹ and a 35 total pressure of 600 kPa. The temperature of the gas mixture at the entrance of the bed was 250°C, whilst the temperature at the reactor outlet was 230°C. Initially the catalyst displayed an activity which

was similar to that observed in the experiment described hereinbefore: the product gas was composed of 6.9% by volume of CH₄, 4.1% by volume of CO₂, 0.2% by volume of CO, 0.0% H₂, H₂O (not determined quantitatively) and N₂. However, after about 5 75 hr the pressure drop over the catalyst bed started to increase appreciably. Fig. 2 of the drawings shows a plot of the pressure drop versus time.

After about 225 hr the deposition of carbon, which brought about the rise in pressure drop over the reactor, had increased so much that 10 the experiment had to be stopped because the catalyst bed got plugged. For comparison Fig. 2 also shows the constant small pressure drop observed during the experiment described hereinbefore, in which under similar conditions a catalyst according to the invention was used.

15 Example V.

The reactor used in example IV was filled with the catalyst prepared and pretreated as described in example I. The catalyst sample contained 6.1 g of reduced nickel. A reaction mixture containing 26.9% by volume of H₂, 17.9% by volume of CO and 55.2% by volume of 20 N₂ was passed through the catalyst bed at a space velocity of 1500 hr⁻¹ and a total pressure of 600 kPa. The temperature of the gas at the entrance of the bed was 260°C, whereas the temperature at the reactor exit was 190°C. The product gas composed of 14.0% by volume of CH₄, 8.2% by volume of CO₂, 0.2% by volume of CO, 0.0% H₂, 25 H₂O (not determined quantitatively) and N₂. The product gas composition did not change during the experiment, which lasted for 650 hr. After 650 hr the experiment was stopped. At that time the pressure drop over the catalyst bed was negligibly small, indicating that carbon deposition and catalyst plugging had not occurred.

30 Example VI.

The equipment described in example IV was used. The reactor was filled with a sample of the catalyst prepared and pretreated as indicated in example I. The catalyst sample contained 5.5 g of reduced nickel. Before a reaction mixture comprising 23.5% by volume of CO, 35 11.8% by volume of H₂ and 64.7% by volume of N₂ entered the reactor, an amount of 49 mmol min⁻¹ of water was added to the mixture in the preheater kept at 450°C. The temperature of the reactants in-

cluding the evaporated water at the entrance of the reactor was 350°C. The products left the reactor at 370°C. The space velocity in the reactor was 1500 hr⁻¹ at a total pressure of 600 kPa. The product gas composition, which was constant over the entire duration 5 of the experiment of 500 hr, was determined to contain 6.5% by volume of CH₄, 13.8% by volume of CO₂, 6.0% by volume of H₂, 1.0% by volume of CO, H₂O (not determined quantitatively) and N₂. After 500 hr the pressure drop over the catalyst bed had not increased, which implies the absence of catalyst plugging owing to severe carbon 10 deposition.

Example VII.

The reactor described in Example IV was filled with the catalyst prepared and pretreated according to the procedures of example I. The catalyst sample contained 5.2 g of reduced nickel. 15 Before a mixture of 11.2% by volume of CO and 88.8% by volume of N₂ was led into the reactor an amount of 29 mmol min⁻¹ of water was added to it in the preheater kept at 450°C. After evaporation of the water the gas mixture entered the reactor at a temperature of 350°C. At the exit of the reactor the temperature was 386°C. In the reactor 20 the space velocity was 1500 hr⁻¹ and the total pressure 600 kPa. The reaction that proceeded in the catalyst bed led to a product containing 2.0% by volume of CH₄, 7.9% by volume of CO₂, 0.1% by volume of CO, 1.0% by volume of H₂, H₂O (not determined quantitatively) and N₂. The product composition remained constant 25 during the experiment which lasted for 1000 hr. After 1000 hr the pressure drop over the reactor was still as small as at the beginning of the experiment. The permanent low level of the pressure drop reveals the absence of catalyst plugging owing to carbon deposition.

Example VIII.

30 A process according to the invention was carried out in an apparatus shown schematically in Fig. 3 of the drawings.

A desulphurized, carbonmonoxide rich gas supplied through line 18 was mixed with steam supplied through line 19 and the mixture was 18 combined with recycled product gas supplied through line 20. The resulting mixture was fed to reactor 21 filled with a catalyst 35 according to the invention. In this reactor the gas was partly converted. The gas leaving this reactor was cooled down through a

waste heat boiler 22 and then fed to a second reactor 23 filled with the same catalyst, in which reactor the gas was further converted. The gas leaving reactor 23 was again cooled down through a waste heat boiler 24. Part of the gas was recycled to the first reactor 21 through cooler 5 25, line 26, compressor 27 and line 20. The product gas left the system through line 28.

In table D are given the product gas composition for a case where the entrance temperatures of both shift-methanation reactors are 350°C and the recycle ratio is 3:1 (i.e. 75% of the gas leaving 10 the second reactor is recycled to the first reactor). After the removal of carbondioxide the gas composition as mentioned in table D has a Wobbe-index of 45.5 MJ/m³, being of the same order as the Wobbe-index of the natural gas produced in the province of Groningen in the Netherlands.

15

Table D.

Component % by vol. Feed gas 1) Product gas 2) Purified

product gas 3)

	H ₂	25.8	3.2	7.9
20	CO	25.1	1.6	3.9
	CH ₄	4.6	34.8	86.0
	CO ₂	16.6	59.8	2.2
	H ₂ O	27.9	0.6	0

25 T (°C) 350 464 30

Notes

- 1) entering reactor 21
- 2) leaving reactor 23
- 3) after CO₂-removal.

30

CLAIMS.

1. A process for the preparation of methane from gas mixtures containing hydrogen and/or steam and at least 5% by volume of carbon-monoxide by means of a nickel catalyst, which contains metallic nickel particles as an active catalyst component on a thermally stable oxidic carrier, characterized in that the metallic nickel particles are chemically bonded to the thermally stable oxidic carrier.

2. A process as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the chemical bond between the metallic nickel particles and the oxidic carrier is provided by an interfacial layer different from the oxidic carrier, which layer consists of a compound containing oxygen and at least one member selected from the group consisting of nickel and the carrier base element or elements.

15 3. A process as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that the interfacial layer consists of
a) a compound containing nickel ions, or
b) a stable non-stoichiometric oxide of the carrier base element or elements, or
20 c) a compound containing nickel and the carrier base element or elements.

4. A process as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that the carrier is an oxide of a carrier base element or elements, which form(s) only stoichiometric oxides, and the interfacial layer 25 contains nickel ions.

5. A process as claimed in claim 4, characterized in that the carrier is an oxide of at least one member of the group consisting of Si, Al and Mg.

6. A process as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that the carrier is an oxide of a carrier base element or elements, which can 30 form a stable non-stoichiometric oxide, and the interfacial layer comprises such non-stoichiometric oxides.

7. A process as claimed in claims 2 to 6, characterized in that the interfacial layer has a thickness between 0.2 and 10 nm, preferably between 0.5 and 5 nm.

8. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 7, characterized in that per cm³ of the catalyst bed there is not more than 0.05 g, preferably

not more than 0.03 g, and most preferably not more than 0.01 g metallic nickel, which is not chemically bonded to the carrier.

9. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 8, characterized in that the nickel particle size distribution is such that less than 10% by 5 volume of the particles is smaller than 2 nm and less than 10% by volume of the particles is larger than 30 nm.

10. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 9 characterized in that the nickel catalyst is obtainable by

a) mixing an aqueous solution of a nickel salt and an aqueous 10 solution of a salt of the base element or elements, the oxide of which is the thermally stable oxidic carrier, raising the pH-value up to a level where the dissolved nickel and base element or elements ions have been substantially completely precipitated, ageing, if required, the precipitate in the solution, separating, hydrothermally 15 treating, if required, and drying, calcinating and reducing the precipitate,

b) mixing an aqueous solution of a nickel salt and an aqueous 20 solution of a salt of the base element or elements, the oxide of which is the thermally oxidic carrier, with an aqueous solution of an oxalate or formate, separating, drying, calcinating and reducing the precipitate, or

c) suspending in a finely divided form the thermally stable oxidic 25 carrier in a dilute aqueous solution of a nickel salt and precipitating a nickel compound at an elevated temperature and with vigorous agitation by forming hydroxyl ions by a chemical reaction, which is known per se, of compounds contained also in the solution, not faster than this is the case by hydrolysis of an aqueous solution of urea, which is present in the solution in an amount of 1 to 10 times the amount stoichiometrically required, followed by separating, 30 calcinating and reducing the loaded carrier, or

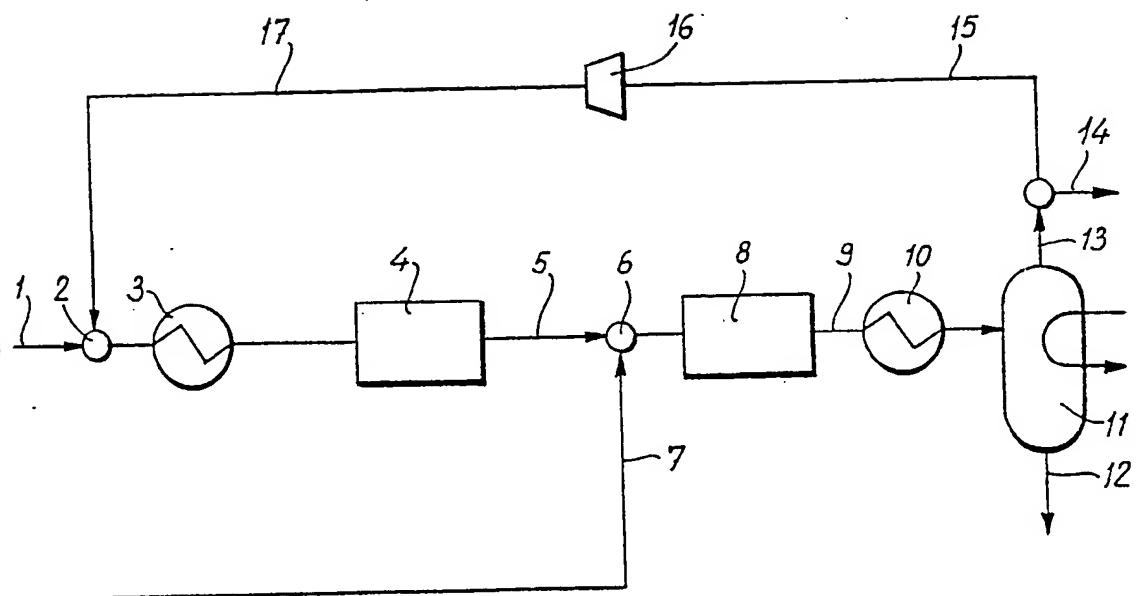
d) suspending in a finely divided form the thermally stable oxidic carrier in a dilute aqueous solution of a nickel salt, raising the pH-value of the resulting suspension by injection of hydroxyl ions below the surface of the vigorously agitated suspension and separating, 35 hydrothermally treating, if required, drying, calcinating, if required, and reducing the loaded carrier, or

e) introducing into the suspension of the thermally stable oxidic

carrier a nickel salt solution under the surface of the suspension while keeping the pH-value of the suspension between 4 and 7, separating, drying, calcinating and reducing the loaded carrier.

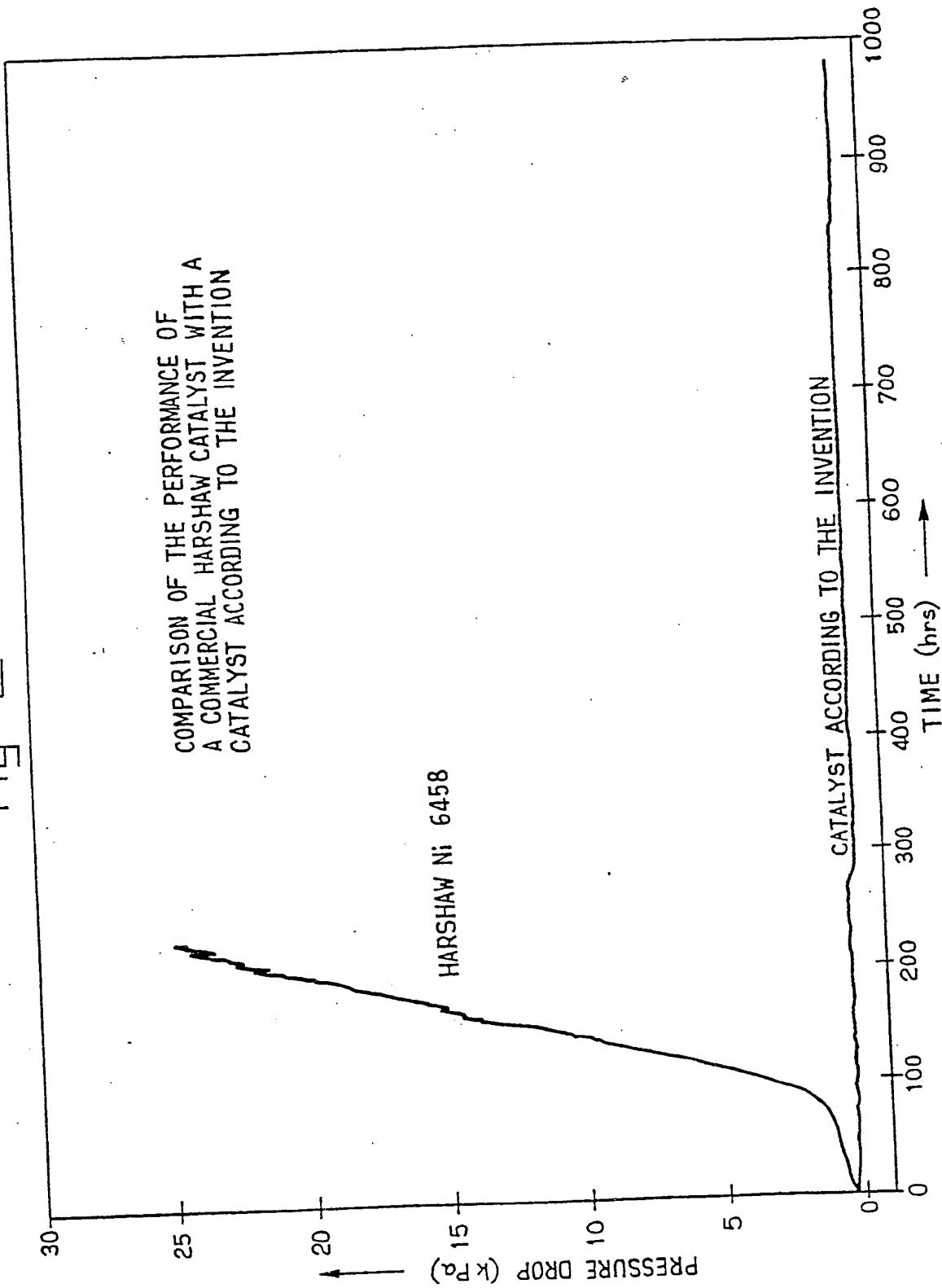
11. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 10, characterized in that the molar ratio H₂/CO is below 2.45, preferably below 1.15.
12. A process as claimed in claim 11, characterized in that the feed gas has an molar H₂/CO ratio below 1 and contains steam in an amount complying with the following formula:
moles H₂O = [(0.5 to 0.6) x moles CO] minus [0.5 x moles H₂]

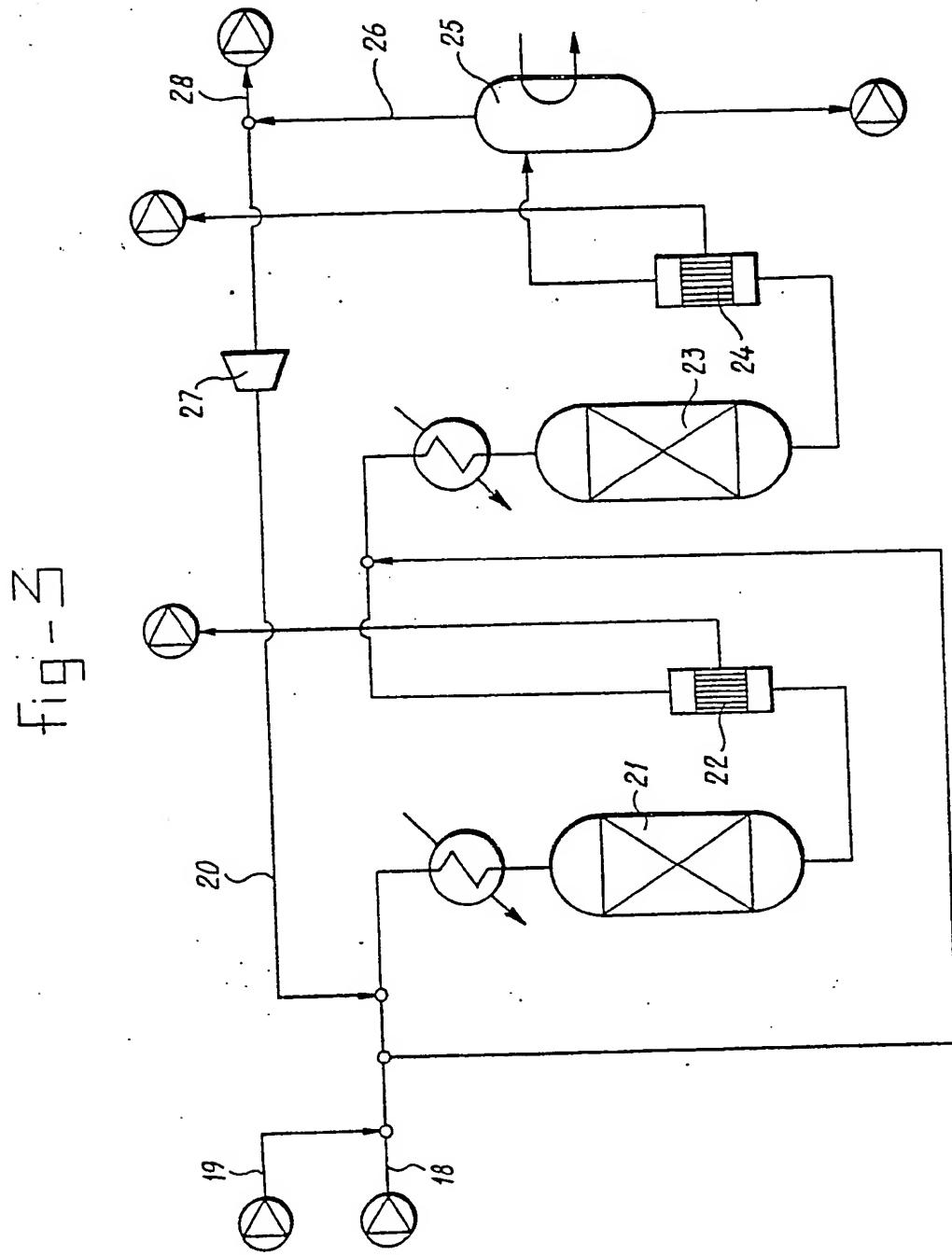
fig-1



tbt

Fig-2







European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application number

EP 83 20 0208

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. 5)
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	
A	FR-A-2 347 326 (EXXON)		C 07 C 9/04 C 07 C 1/04 C 07 C 1/10 B 01 J 23/74
A,D	FR-A-2 256 234 (TEXACO)		
A,D	FR-A-1 074 037 (RUHRCHEMIE)		
A	DE-C- 376 428 (FARBWERKE VORM. MEISTER LUCIUS & BRÜNING)		
A	GB-A-1 367 088 (UNILEVER)		
	* Examples 1,2 *		
A,D	DE-A-1 767 202 (STAMICARBON)		
	* Examples V,VII *		
A,D	RECEUIL DES TRAVAUX CHIMIQUES DES PAYS-BAS, vol. 70, September-October 1951, pages 793-812, The Hague, NL. J.J.B. VAN EIJK VAN VOORTHUIJSEN et al.: "Structure and properties of compounds formed during the preparation of nickel-on-silica catalysts"		
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE	Date of completion of the search 27-04-1983	Examiner VAN GEYT J.J.A.	
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